Purification
of the Self

Purification (*Tazkiyah*) covers a number of Islamic imperatives: purifying oneself of the temptations of the self and Satan; refraining from negative reaction when faced with unpleasant experiences caused by others; and remaining resistant to such temptations that cause man to deviate from the straight path etc.

Tazkiyah literally means growth, one example of which can be seen in a tree. A tree is the result of the growth of a seed. When a seed finds a favourable environment, it starts growing till it becomes a green, verdant tree. The same is true of the purification of man. In this sense *tazkiyah* also conveys intellectual development.

Tazkiyah means purifying the individual of unfavourable elements, so that he may reach the point of perfection in a favourable environment.

Man has been created by God with an upright nature. But it happens that various weaknesses and temptations cloud the essential upright nature. Man ought to make unremitting efforts to keep himself away from them.

The task of the Prophet was to make people aware of this principle of purification and lead them towards attaining it.

The Importance of *Tazkiyah*

According to the 20th chapter of the Quran, Paradise is for one who purifies his soul. The decision about which human beings will enter paradise will be based on individual merit rather than on personal affiliation to any community or group.

Therefore, Paradise is only for the individual who purifies himself. Purification means abandoning a life of ignorance and wretchedness and leading a life ruled by the conscience.

Tazkiyah means purifying the individual of unfavourable elements, so that he may reach the point of perfection in a favourable environment. This was a very important task given to the prophets.

In the present age of scientific thinking it is essential to speak to people in a manner that addresses their minds. The source of *tazkiyah* in present times is exactly the same as it was in ancient times. But there is a difference of approach between the two – that of the manner of presentation. In ancient times the traditional style ways were effective for people of that age, but, in present times, for effective *tazkiyah*, it is essential to change the style of presentation. Only then will it be possible for the modern man to understand the importance of *tazkiyah* and pursue it in his life.

The traditional style relied on authority and rhetoric, it focused on feeling, was not open to questioning as the presenters were used to being accepted. The modern style relies on facts and logic, giving appropriate references to the Quran and Hadith, it uses lucid and easily understandable language.

For instance, in ancient times the word 'purification' or 'reform' of the self was used. The traditional mind could easily appreciate the nuances and the implications of such words. The modern man can understand this fact better if we change our words. We will have to explain how a man can be 'conditioned' by prevalent beliefs e.g. a person can be conditioned to believe that without dishonesty one cannot survive in business. A modern man can understand that for the purpose of a person's reform, it is essential to decondition and reengineer his mind to make him capable of seeing reality 'as it is' and thus form accurate opinions.

The level of nearness to God depends on the level of personal realization of God.

"*Tazkiyah* alone can lead one to Heaven." The Quran, 20:76

Tazkiyah and Self Development

Self development has become an area of abiding interest for the modern man. *Tazkiyah* is the Islamic method of self development, one that has the sanctity of the Prophet behind it.

Tazkiyah enables a person to reach his full potential by removing obstacles from his path of development. Negative emotions like pride, jealousy, hypocrisy and wrong actions like cheating, back biting, slander etc. all prevent a person from attaining his full potential. It is essential that these negatives be curbed and strongly controlled.

Believers shall do well to pursue the path of self development by adopting the path of the Prophet and not resort to other methods which can be of limited benefit at best or lead to confusion and bewilderment at worst.

Self development offers a person a multitude of benefits including peace and tranquility, a congenial home environment, satisfaction at work, cordial relations in the neighbourhood among others.

Means of Reaching God

Man is the creation and God is his Creator. As such, it is human nature that he should come close to God to the ultimate extent. But various things, such as pride, negative thinking, etc., separate man from God. *Tazkiyah* aims at thoroughly purifying man of such negative feelings. The moment one detaches oneself from things other than God, one instantly feels that one has come as close to one's Creator as it is humanly possible to come. One begins to experience the presence of God all around one.

Tazkiyah enables a person to reach his full potential by removing obstacles from his path of development.

The level of nearness to God depends on the level of personal realization of God. For instance, everyone is in need of innumerable things to survive in this world. But no human being is the creator of all these things. Someone else has bestowed them upon mankind, and God is undoubtedly that Bestower. God, the Supreme Being, is the only Giver. It is undoubtedly due to God's unilateral blessings that man can exist in this world. If – even for a moment – this chain of blessings were broken, man would no longer be able to sustain himself.

How to Attain *Tazkiyah?*

Traditionally, some things are considered to be the means of attaining *tazkiyah*, such as, supererogatory prayers, recitation of the Quran, prophetic prayers, meditation, companionship, taking lessons from the lives of the "saints", etc. According to this thinking, *tazkiyah* is like a fixed course, or something to be learned from a manual. However, the truth is that there is no fixed course for attaining *tazkiyah*. *Tazkiyah* can be attained only through a living act. The real means of attaining the ends of *tazkiyah* is for man to reflect on the signs of God, activate his thinking, and through continuous reflection or pondering, discover the deeper realities of things. This discovery is spiritual food for a person who is a seeker of *tazkiyah*. For instance, suppose you see a bird. This reminds you of this saying of the Prophet that the hearts of the people of Paradise will be like the hearts of birds.

You later begin to think about yourself – whether or not your heart is like that of the bird; whether or not your heart is free of all negative thinking like that of the bird; whether or not you are free from greed like the bird; whether or not you are as harmless as a bird; whether or not you follow the law of nature, just as the bird does. Such thinking is the essence of *tazkiyah*. Without such introspection, no one can attain *tazkiyah*.

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Tazkiyah
Purification of the Soul